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WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES

THE EVE
OF
ST. AGNES

— BY —
JOHN KEATS.

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No. 40.
ENGLISH CLASSICS.

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

BY
JOHN KEATS.

WITH PHILOLOGICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY
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BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SKETCH.

1. 1795—1817. JOHN KEATS was born October 29, 1795, in Moorfields, London. His father, employed in some large livery stables there, had married his master's daughter. Killed by a fall from a horse in 1804, he left his widow, who survived him six years, a moderate competency. John was sent to school at Enfield, when he learnt some little Latin and Classical Mythology, and was then apprenticed to a surgeon in Edmonton. In 1812, during his apprenticeship, a great era was made in his life by the perusal of the *Faerie Queene*. Deep called unto deep; Keats felt that he too was a poet. In 1815 he came up to London "to walk the hospitals." At this time he made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt and other notable men of the day. He began to form a dislike to his appointed profession. This arose partly from the extreme nervousness of his nature—he mistrusted his skill as an operator—partly no doubt from his growing devotion to his own proper art. 1817 he published a little volume of poems.

2. 1818—1821. This volume attracted little, or no general notice. But Keats had now made his election. He was fully conscious of the high requirements of the work he had chosen, and of his own imperfections. In 1818 was published *Endymion*. This poem, with all its many faults, gave unmistakable signs of a genuine poetic power, and of aims and strivings of the loftiest order. It met with simply infamous treatment from the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, and other, minor serials. The author was told to "go back to his gallipots," and that "a starved apothecary was better than a starved poet." And this in the face of an extremely touching preface, in which he had frankly acknowledged his many shortcomings. The story that these brutal reviews shortened Keats' life is happily without foundation. They were too coarse to wound him; he thoroughly despised them. He went on steadily toiling to satisfy somewhat better his own high ideal—in his own words, "fitting himself for verses fit to live." And the progress he made was

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grand. In *Hyperion* a true master is apparent. But meanwhile, consumption, an hereditary disease, which in 1818 had laid low one of his brothers, began to undermine him. His delicate health was no doubt made worse by certain love troubles. He had become attached with all the vehemence of his nature to a lady at Hampstead. His passion was returned; but his pecuniary position seemed at this time hopeless. What little money he had received from his mother was gone; he had abandoned the medical profession; his literary prospects were anything but bright. Moreover, he was much dissatisfied with his own poetic performances. All these things broke him down. As a last chance, it was arranged that he should winter in Italy. In September, 1820, he sailed for Naples, accompanied by his true friend Severn, a painter of rising fame. From Naples he went to Rome, only to die. There for some weeks he lay bed-ridden, more than "half in love with easeful Death," not calling him

"Soft names in many a mused rhyme
To take into the air my quiet breath,"

but calling him eagerly, often somewhat wildly. At last the call was answered. "Thank God, it has come," he said, rejoicing at the near release from all his pains of body and mind. This was on the 27th of February, 1821. He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery; where some eighteen months afterwards Shelley too, his fervent elegist, was laid.

ὦ μέλεος ἥβης σῆς, Ὀρέστα, καὶ πότμου
θανάτου τ' δώρου. ζῆν ἐχρῆν σ' ὅτ' οὐκέτ' εἶ.

Keats had not reached his poetic prime when he died. The work he has left behind him is marked by numerous signs of youthfulness. It is florid, luxuriant, often wild and wanton. He was only just beginning to learn the great duty of restraint, of pruning, of selection. Few geniuses have been more liberally endowed by nature; it is not perhaps too much to say that amongst the many great poets of this century Keats was pre-eminently, if not solely, the one of epical power; but he was only just learning how to manage his splendid property. To begin with, he was a very prodigal.

a mere lavisher; he scattered his pearls and gems recklessly around him, and had no sense of any noble economy. His education was all along very imperfect. His school-training was inadequate. Leigh Hunt, his chief friend and counsellor when he came up to town, was not of sufficient culture and judgment to guide him. The critics, instead of trying to direct and promote his growth, simply mocked and abused him. Indeed England gave but a queer welcome to her brilliant son.

What Keats above all things wanted was a wise education. Perhaps for no man that ever lived would the thorough study of "the Classics," especially of Greek literature, have been more beneficial. With Greek art, so far as he knew it, he deeply sympathised; see especially his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and the *Sonnet on first looking into Chapman's Homer*, but there is scarcely a poem in which this sympathy is not shown. There was in him the keenest sense and enjoyment of beauty; and this gave him a fellow-feeling with the great Greek masters. He recognised in them the most perfect representers of the beautiful, and this, so far as literature went, through translations. Happily he could know their plastic art better through the specimens treasured up in the British Museum, of which he was an earnest, rapturous visitor. But it was only one side of Greek art that he saw. He saw its beauty; but he did not see its purity, its self-restraint, its severe refinement. He did not learn from it that the fancy must not be merely indulged. A knowledge of Sophocles might have impressed this lesson upon him.

His one great delight in English literature was a dangerous model for him. Spenser as a writer suffers from diffuseness and exuberance. No doubt years, had they been granted him, would have taught him repression and control. Certainly he was beginning to grow wiser in this respect. *Hyperion* is a hopeful advance upon *Endymion*. The flowers do not lie so tanglingly thick there; the pathway is not encumbered with them; one is not choked with sweet odors; one's eyes are not dazzled and blinded with a monstrous blaze of colors. Clearly, he was gathering a better understanding of his art. The Apollo of whom he had sung so sweetly but so wildly, was revealing himself to him: the Muses were becoming known in their

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serene, not showy beauty, draped gracefully, not in any garish colors.

But who would part with what he has left us, let the faults be what they may? No works of our literature are more truly poetical, none more completely carry one away into an ideal realm, where worldly noises come to the ear, if they reach it at all, subdued and deadened; none breathe out of them, and around them, a more bewitching atmosphere. His song as one hears it is like that of the nightingale as he heard it:

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past and Lethe-wards had sunk.”

Not without reason Shelley, apostrophizing Keats, calls the nightingale “thy spirit” sister.

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

Introductory Note.—The chief incident of this poem is founded on a popular superstition. The belief which in Scotland is associated with Halloween, or the Eve of All Saints' Day, was in England attached to the vigil of St. Agnes, whose feast was celebrated on January the 21st. It was thought that, if certain rites and forms were observed, maidens might be vouchsafed a sight of their future husbands. The accounts of these requisite ceremonies vary. See Chambers' *Book of Days*, also Ellis' Brand's *Pop. Antiq.* It is impossible to say when such a notion became connected with St. Agnes. Her legend is "one of the oldest" of the church; see Mrs. Jameson's *Sacred and Leg. Art*; her effigies are as old as any, next to those of the Evangelists and Apostles; but in the story of her martyrdom, in the Diocletian persecution, there is no sign of the matrimonial interest that is found at a later time adding to her popularity. For other legends that gathered around her, her name is no doubt answerable. It was impossible that it should not suggest "agna," and that, consequently, lambs and she should not be allied. In Tennyson's lines, called *St. Agnes' Eve*, the speaker, some saintly nun, wins through prayer and faith a vision of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

Other incidents of the poem seem to have been drawn from *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps from Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, and also, it may be, from the old Haddon Hall story of the elopement of Dorothy Vernon with her true lover, John Manners.

The poem abounds with the beauties, and with the faults, that characterize Keats. It need not mar one's enjoyment of it as a poem that its archæology is somewhat inaccurate. Scott himself is by no means perfect in this respect. If we are not introduced into the veritable mediæval world, at least we are taken out of our own present workaday atmosphere; we are borne away into a land of enchantment; we feel the very air of romance blowing around us; we too are "hood-winked with faery fancy."

I.

ST. AGNES' EVE—Ah, bitter chill it was !

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold ;

The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,

1. **St. Agnes' Eve**, Jan. 21.

2. **for all his feathers**; in spite of all his feathers. *a-cold*. So *King Lear*, III. iv, 84, etc. In 13th and 14th century writings occur the forms *acolden*, to grow or make cold; *akelen*, *ac-colded*, and *acold*, part, &c. The *a* here is a corrupted form of an intensive prefix *af* or *of*. So in *a-hungred*, which in *Piers Ploughman*, vi. 269, appears as *af-ynghred*. So *afereid*, *afraid*, *atheist*, *ago*, *aweary* (as *Mids. N. D.* V. i. 257, etc.) etc.

And silent was the flock in woolly fold :
 Numb was the Beadsman's fingers while he told 5
 His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
 Like pious incense from a censer old,
 Seem'd taking flight for heaven without a death,
 Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

II.

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man ; 10
 Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,
 And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,
 Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees :
 The sculptur'd dead on each side seem to freeze,
 Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails : 15
 Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,

5. **Beadsman**=strictly, prayers-man. The term often denoted one who in return for obligations received gave his benefactor the benefit of his prayers. Hence often beadsman=almsman. So the "blue-gowns" of Scotland are called *King's Bedesmen*; see the *Antiquary*. As for prayers being looked upon as a return for material kindnesses, comp. the yet extant phrase in "petitions": "and your petitioners will ever pray," etc. See in the N. T., *St. James*, v. 15, *Shakspeare*, *passim*. For the form of the word, in *Piers Pl.* is found *bedeman*, in the *Ancrer Rible*, *beodeman*. The final *e* of *bede* represents the old plural inflection. When that inflection was superseded by *s*, then came in the form *bedesman*. For the derivation, *bede* is connected with *bid*, *beadle*, etc. *Bead*,=a little ball, is *bede* itself in a secondary sense.

told, counted. *Tell* occurs frequently in this sense of "to count."

6. **Rosary** = (i) a rose-bed. See Virgil's "biferique rosaria Pæsti" (*Georg.* iv. 119). (ii) a rose-chaplet, a garland. Jeremy Taylor speaks of "rosaries and coronets." (iii) a selection of prayers. (iv) a string of beads; see note on *bedesman*, l. 4.

Comp. Tennyson's *St. Agnes' Eve*:

"My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
 May my soul follow soon."

7. **Censer** is shortened from the Fr. *encensoir*, Lat. *incensarium*. [Give other instances of such abbreviation.]

8. [Explain *without a death*.]

12. **Meagre** is from the Lat. *macer*, as *eager* from *acer* (*vin-ager*=vinum-acre).

13. **Degrees** is here used in its radical sense. *-gree* is from the Lat. *gradus*.

15. [What does he mean by *purgatorial rails*?]

16. [What is meant by *dumb* here?]

[*orat'ries*. What letter does the apostrophe represent here? What other letters does it occasionally represent?]

He passeth by ; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

III.

Northward he turneth through a little door,
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue 20
Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor ;
But no—already had his death-bell rung ;
The joys of all this life were said and sung :
His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve :
Another way he went, and soon among 25
Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,
And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV.

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft ;
And so it chanc'd, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft, 30
The silver snarling trumpets 'gan to chide :

17. **Fails.** Comp. *In Mem.* ii.:

"I seem to *fail* from out my blood."

18. **Hoods.** *Hood* is cognate with *head*.

mails. This *mail* (quite distinct from *mail*, Fr. *maille* = trunk or bag, especially one for letters, which is of Teutonic origin) is ultimately from Lat. *macula*, in its secondary sense of a hole, an interstice, a mesh ; which sense it has for instance in Ovid's *Her.* v. 16, where *Ænone* speaks of her old pastimes with Paris :

"*Retia sepe comes maculis distincta tetendi.*"

Hence *macula*, becoming *macla*, becoming *maille*, the Eng. *mail*, denotes steel-ring armor ; then, generally, steel armor of any kind.

21. **Flatter'd.** Leigh Hunt (breaks out into an ecstasy on the use of this verb here.) He says, the old man thinks the music is for him as well as for others, etc. etc ; see *Imagination and Fancy*. But probably Keats uses the word somewhat vaguely—he is not a very accurate writer—for *softened*, Lat. *solvit*. Comp. Dreyden's *Dufresnoy apud Johnson*: "A consort of voices pleasingly fills their ears, and *flatters* them." Johnson defines *flatter* in this usage, as, "to please, to sooth." This sense, he says, is "purely Gallick." Etymologically, *flatter* is closely akin to *flatten*, *flat*, etc.

31. **Chide.** The A. S. *cidan*, whence *chide*=to strive, quarrel, brawl. Whence *chide* of any clamor, or noise, as of dogs, as *Mids.* N.D. IV. i. 119, of a flood, *Ilen VIII.* III. ii. 197 (comp. the reading *chiding* in *Othello*, II. i. 12), etc. With the sense here comp. the use of *bray*, as in *braying trumpets*, *K. John*, III. i. 303.

The level chambers, ready with their pride,
 Were glowing to receive a thousand guests :
 The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
 Stared, where upon their head the cornice rests, 35
 With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their
 breasts.

V.

At length burst in the argent revelry,
 With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
 Numerous as shadows haunting fairily
 The brain, new-stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay 40
 Of old romance. These let us wish away,
 And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
 Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
 On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,
 As she had heard old dames full many times declare. 45

VI.

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve.
 Young virgins might have visions of delight,
 And soft adorings from their loves receive
 Upon the honey'd middle of the night,
 If ceremonies due they did aright ; 50
 As supperless to bed they must retire,
 And couch supine their beauties, lily white ;

32. **The level chambers.** Comp. *the level matting* in l. 196.

37. **Argent** = silver-bright, gleaming.

revelry = revellers. *ry* is a termination with a collective, and so sometimes a generalizing force.

38. **Tiara** is a Persian word, brought into Europe by the Greeks.

Turban, too is of Persian origin. Here it would seem that *tiara* refers to the ladies' head-dresses.

40. **Triumphs.** Public shows or exhibitions, such as masques, pageants, processions.

43. [Explain this use of *brooded*. Can you illustrate it from the Latin or the Greek ?]

45. [How would you explain *as* here ?]

49. **Upon**, etc. So Tennyson's *Mariana* : " Upon the middle of the night," Virgil's "*nocte super media*" (*Æn.* ix. 61).

52. **Supine** = lying on the back. See l. 54. Contrast *pronus*. From

Nor look behind, nor sideways but require
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

VII.

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline: 55
The music, yearning like a God in pain,
She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,
Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
Pass by—she heeded not at all; in vain
Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier, 60
And back retir'd, not cool'd by high disdain,
But she saw not; her heart was elsewhere;
She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

VIII.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short: 65
The hallow'd hour was near at hand: she sighs
Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport,
'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
Hoodwink'd with fairy fancy, all amort, 70

the complete relaxation of the attitude comes the secondary sense of indolent. "The fourth cause of error," says Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Vulgar Errors*, "is a *supinity* or neglect of enquiry, even in matters wherein we doubt, rather believing than going to see."

54. **For.** The construction is according to the analogy of *pray* for, etc.

60. **Tiptoe** = excited. See *Hen.* V. IV. iii. 42.

70. **Hoodwink'd** = strictly, hooded or covered as to the eyes, *i. e.* blinded: see *All's Well that Ends Well*, IV. i. 90; *Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 3:

"We'll have no Cupid *hoodwink'd* with a scarf," etc.

So the simple *hooded* in *Meas. for Meas.* V. i. 338: comp. *hoodman*. For *hood* see l. 18. *Wink* in this compound seems = that which winks, the eye, though as a simple word, it does not appear to occur in that sense. Perhaps it is shortened from *winkers*. *Blinkers* is used for eyes in the dialect of "slang."

fairy = Fairy land; as in the title of Spencer's poem.

all amort. See *Taming of the Shr.* IV. iii. 36, etc. Probably, as Nares suggests, a corruption of *alamort*. Fanshawe writes *alamort* in his translation of the *Lusiad*, v. 85.

Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX.

So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire 75
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,
But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen, 80
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things
have been.

X.

He ventures in : let no buzz'd whisper tell :
All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords
Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel :
For him those chambers held barbarian hordes, 85
Hyena, foemen, and hot-blooded lords,
Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage : not one breast affords
Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,
Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul. 90

71. [What is the force of *to here*?]

75. *On fire*. In *afame* the *on* is corrupted.

77. [What is meant by *buttress'd* here?] *Buttress* and *abutment* and *butt* are all cognate.

82. Comp. the visit of Romeo and his friends to the house of the Capulets.

84. *Citadel* is the Ital. *citadella*, dim. of *citta*, a city.

90. *Beldame*. So 1 *Hen. IV.*, III. i. 32, etc. Perhaps the *bel* = *belle* is used ironically, perhaps euphemistically. Johnson says that in Old Fr. the word "signified probably an old woman, as *belle âge*, old age." But *belle âge* scarcely illustrates *belle dame*. In English we can speak of "a fair age," "a good age," "a good old age"; but we couldn't say "a good or a fair man" for "a good-aged man." *Goodman* and *goodwife* mean something very different.

XI.

Ah, happy chance ! the aged creature came,
 Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,
 To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,
 Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond
 The sound of merriment and chorus bland : 95
 He startled her ; but soon she knew his face,
 And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand,
 Saying, " Mercy, Porphyro ! hie thee from this place ;
 They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race !

XII.

"Get hence ! get hence ! there's dwarfish Hilde-
 brand ; 100
 He had a fever late, and in the fit
 He cursed thee and thine, both house and land :
 Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit
 More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me ! flit !
 Flit like a ghost away."—" Ah, Gossip dear, 105
 We're safe enough ; here in this arm-chair sit,
 And tell me how "—" Good Saints ! not here, not here:
 Follow me, child, or else those stones will be thy bier."

XIII.

He follow'd through a lowly arched way,
 Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume ; 110
 And as she mutter'd " Well-a—well-a-day !"
 He found him in a little moonlight room,

94. **Hall-pillar.** From the words immediately following it would seem that Keats uses *hall* here in the modern acceptation, for a vestibule ; not in the mediæval, for the chief room of the house.

100. **Dwarfish.** *Dwarf* is the later form of the Ancient English *dweorh* or *dweorg* = crooked.

101. **Fit** is perhaps connected with *fight*. It is quite a distinct word from *fit*, the adj., also used substantively, which is from the Fr. *fail*.

105. **Gossip** = god-sib, strictly, a god-kinsman, or a kinsman with respect to God, that is, in a religious sense ; a sponsor at one's baptism, a godfather or godmother. On the corruption of meaning see Trench's *Eng. Past and Pres.*

Pale, latticed, chill, and silent as a tomb.
 "Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,
 "O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom 115
 Which none but secret sisterhood may see,
 When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

XIV.

"St. Agnes ! Ah ! it is St. Agnes' Eve—
 Yet men will murder upon holy days :
 Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve, 120
 And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,
 To venture so : it fills me with amaze
 To see thee, Porphyro !—St. Agnes' Eve !
 God's help ! my lady fair the conjuror plays
 This very night : good angels her deceive ! 125
 But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

XV.

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,
 While Porphyro upon her face doth look,

116. See the extract from the *Translation of Naageorgus*, apud Brand:

"Then commes in place St. Agnes' Day, which here in Germanie
 Is not so much esteemde nor kept with such solemnitie ;
 But in the Popish Court it standes in passing hie degree,
 As spring and head of wondrous gaine, and great commoditee.
 For in St. Agnes' church upon this day while masse they sing,
 Two lambes as white as snowe the nonnes do yearly use to bring :
 And when the Agnus chaunted is upon the aulter hie,
 (For in this thing there hidden is a solemne mysterie)
 They offer them. The servants of the pope when this is done
 Do put them into pastures good till shearing time be come.
 Then other wooll they mingle with these holy fleeces twaine
 Whereof, being ssonne and drest, are made the pals of passing gain."

120. See Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft*, Book xii. chap. xvi. p. 145, of Ed. 1665 : "Leonardus Vairus saith that there was a Prayer extant whereby might be carried in a sieve water or other liquor. I think it was clam clay, which a crow taught a maid that was promised a cake of so great quantity as might be kneaded of so much flour as she could wet with water that she brought in a sieve, and by that means she clam'd it with clay, and so beguiled her sisters, etc. And this Tale I heard among my grannams maids whereby I can decipher this witchcraft."

121. You should be Oberon himself.

126. **Mickle**. The Ancient Eng. *mícel* or *mycel*, Old Eng. *moche*, Mod. Eng. *much*.

Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone
 Who keepeth closed a wond'rous riddle-book, 130
 As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
 But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
 His lady's purpose ; and he scarce could brook
 Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
 And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old. 135

XVI.

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
 Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
 Made purple riot : then doth he propose
 A stratagem, that makes the beldame start :
 " A cruel man and impious thou art : 140
 Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep and dream
 Alone with her good angels, far apart
 From wicked men like thee. Go, Go ! I deem
 Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

XVII.

" I will not harm her, by all saints I swear," 145
 Quoth Porphyro : " O may I ne'er find grace
 When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
 If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
 Or look with ruffian passion in her face :
 Good Angela, believe me by these tears ; 150
 Or I will, even in a moment's space,

129. **Urchin**, strictly = a hedgehog, coming ultimately from the Lat. *ericius*, is used jocosely for a child. The father

"Must needs express his love's excess
 With words of unmeant bitterness."

crone means strictly a crooning or groaning sound. As if a beggar should be called a *whine*.

133. **Brook** is oddly used here. *Brook*, from the Anct. Eng. *brucan* (comp. Germ. *brauchen*, Lat. *fruior*, *fructus*), means to use, to bear, to endure. *He scarce could brook tears* must mean "he could scarcely tolerate tears," certainly not "he could scarcely refrain from tears."

136. [**Like a full-blown rose**. What is the point of the simile ? What verb, or verbal does the phrase strictly qualify ?]

Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,
And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves
and bears."

XVIII.

"Ah ! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul ?
A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing, 155
Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll;
Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,
Were never miss'd." Thus plaining, doth she bring
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro,
So woeful, and of such deep sorrowing, 160
That Angela gives promise she will do
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

XIX.

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy 165
That he might see her beauty unespied,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
While legion'd fairies paced the coverlet,
And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed.

153. **Fang'd.** *Fang* is strictly that which seizes or clutches. Probably *finger* is of the same root.

156. **Passing-bell.** It was called also the soul bell. See Ellis' Brand's *Pop. Antiq.* Ellis quotes from the *Advertisements for due Order*, &c. 7 Eliz.: "Item, that when anye Christian bodie is in passing that the bell be tolled, and that the curate be speciallie called for to comforte the sicke person; and after the time of his passage to ringe no more but one shorte peale," etc. He mentions "the present national saying":

"When the bell begins to toll,
Lord have mercy on the soul."

158. **Plaining.** So *plaint*. The stem is Lat. *plango*.

162. **Betide** is Anct. Eng. *tidan* to happen. *Tidings* = what happens, occurrences; then an account of what happens.

weal. So *wealth*, as in the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Grant her in health and *wealth* long to live."

169. [**Pale enchantment.** How would you explain the epithet ?]

Never on such a night have lovers met, 170
 Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX.

"It shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame :
 "All cates and dainties shall be stored there
 Quickly on this feast-night : by the tambour frame
 Her own lute thou wilt see : no time to spare, 175
 For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare
 On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
 Wait here, my child, with patience kneel in prayer
 The while : Ah ! thou must needs the lady wed,
 Or may I never leave my grave among the dead." 180

XXI.

So saying she hobbled off with busy fear.
 The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd ;
 The dame return'd, and whispered in his ear
 To follow her, with aged eyes aghast
 From fright of dim espial. Safe at last, 185
 Through many a dusky gallery, they gain
 The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd and chaste ;
 Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain.
 His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII.

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade, 190
 Old Angela was feeling for the stair,

171. Evident reference is made to the fearful storm which swept over the woods of Broceliande, the night of that day when Merlin revealed his charm to his mistress and was tree-prisoned for ever. But Keats seems to be confusing that story with some other. See Tennyson's *Enid*.

177. **Cater** is the Old Fr. *acater*, Mod. Fr. *acheter*, L. Lat. *acceptare*.

180. = "Utinam nunquam resurgam."

181. **Hobble** is formed from *hop*.

188. **Amain**. Suddenly.

When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
 Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware :
 With silver taper's light, and pious care,
 She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led 195
 To a safe level matting. Now prepare,
 Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed ;
 She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.

XXIII.

Out went the taper as she hurried in ;
 Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died : 200
 She closed the door, she panted, all akin
 To spirits of the air, and visions wide :
 No utter'd syllable, or woe betide !
 But to her heart her heart was voluble,
 Paining with eloquence her balmy side ; 205
 As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
 Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

193. **Like a mission'd spirit** = like a spirit commissioned to succor the old woman.

196. **Matting**. The poet should mean the rushes that were strewn over the mediæval floor; see 2 *Henry IV.* V. v. 1, *Tam. of the Shrew*, IV. i. 48, etc.; but matting can scarcely denote them. See note on *carpet*, l. 251.

198. **Ring-dove**. The cushat or wood-pigeon, is so called from a white line that runs round its neck.

fled. Many neut. verbs in Eng. have past part. used in an active sense. In this respect as in many others, the affinity between English and Greek is noticeable. *Fled* here = Φυγόντων. It could not be translated into Latin by any one word; imagine such a form as *fugite*. The only verbs in Latin which have past participles with an active sense are what are termed deponent verbs: thus *dead* is exactly represented by *mortuus*, *risen* by *ortus*, *started* (on a journey) by *profectus*, etc.

202. [What do you think is meant by *visions wide* ?]

204. **Voluble**. See it in its more literal sense in the form *volubil* accented on the penult., in *Par. Lost*, iv. 594:

“Whether the prime orb
 Incredible how swift, had thither roll'd
 Diurnal; or this less *volubil* earth
 By shorter flight to the East had left him there,” etc.

Elsewhere Milton uses *voluble*.

206. When the tongue-bereft Philomela of the old Greek story was transformed into a nightingale, her tongue was restored her, or she might have died such a death.

XXIV.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
 All garlanded with carven imag'ries
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass, 210
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
 As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings ;
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings, 215
 A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and
 kings.

XXV.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;

208. **Casement** = strictly, the *case* or *frame* of the window. *Case* radically means that which contains or encloses, the ultimate stem being the Lat. *capsa*.

212. [What is the force of *of* here?]

213. **Tiger-moth**. See Wood's *Nat. Hist., Insects*.

216. [What does *shielded* mean here? What other meanings does it sometimes bear?]

shielded scutcheon. Strictly this phrase is tautologous: for *scutcheon* or *escutcheon* is the Old Fr. *escusson*, which is from the Lat. *scutum*, a shield. Cognate is *esquire*, Old Fr. *escuyer* from *scutarius*. Technically *scutcheon* = a heraldic shield; Keats somewhat inaccurately uses *scutcheon* here to denote simply armorial bearings.

218. **Gules** = red color, represented in engraved shields by vertical lines. See *Hamlet*, II. ii. 477, of "heraldry," with which Pyrrhus was smeared:

"Head to foot

Now is he total *gules*, horridly trick'd

With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons," etc.

In *Timon of Athens*, IV. iii. 59, the misanthrope bids Alcibiades

"With man's blood paint the ground, *gules*, *gules*."

The ultimate stem is that Lat. *gula* the throat.

According to Mr. Millais' illustration, this exquisite passage is founded on a falsity. The light of the moon would not be strong enough to reflect the colors of the window. One feels a wretched iconoclast for saying so.

Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest, 220
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
 And on her hair a glory, like a saint :
 She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
 Save wings, for heaven :—Porphyro grew faint :
 She knelt so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint. 225

XXVI.

Anon his heart revives : her vespers done,
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees,
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one,
 Loosens her fragrant bodice ; by degrees 230
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees :
 Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVIII.

Soon trembling in her soft and chilly nest, 235
 In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
 Until the poppi'd warmth of sleep oppress'd
 Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away ;

221. **Amethyst** = violet. Commonly a violet-colored precious stone, so called primitively because it was believed to have the virtue of preventing drunkenness.

222. **A glory**. So *nimbus*, and *aureola*.

229. **Bodice**. Formerly *bodies*, from fitting close to the body, as Fr. *corset*, from *corps*. "A woman's bodies, or a pair of bodies, corset, corpsset." Ben Jonson writes *bodies*, see an *Elegie* :

"The whalebone man

That quilts those *bodies* I have leave to span,"

for probably here *those bodies* = that bodice : but it is possible it may = those bodices. Laced bodices seem to have been the mode in the first half of the eighteenth century.

231. **Mermaid** = sea-maid. *Mer* is of the same family as the *mor* in *Ar-mor-i-ca* and in *Mor-ini*, the Lat. *mare*, Eng. *mar-iner*, *mar-ish* or *mar-sh*, etc.

237. Prosaisically, the epithet *poppi'd* should perhaps be attached to *sleep*, rather than to *warmth*, but indeed *warmth of sleep* is but a phrase

Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day,
 Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain, 240
 Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray,
 Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
 As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII.

Stolen to this paradise, and so entranced,
 Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress, 245
 And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
 To wake into a slumberous tenderness ;
 Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
 And breath'd himself : then from the closet crept,
 Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness 250
 And over the hush'd carpet, silent, slept,
 And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo !—how fast she
 slept.

XXIX.

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
 Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set

for *warm sleep*, like "Cato's virtue for 'the virtuous Cato,' 'Hercules' strength' for 'the strong Hercules,' etc. See *Georg.* i. 78 :

"Lethæo perfusa papavera somno."

[What does he mean, do you think, by *poppied* ?]

239. **The morrow-day.** *Morrow* strictly = *morning*, the *-ow* = *ing*, both being diminutival. But the strict sense has been forgotten, as in *To-morrow-^{id} 'ht.*

240. = unread, and so unopened. Mohammedans would no more care to peruse the Christian Scriptures, than Christians those of Mohammed.

242. See Tennyson's *Ulysses*.

244. **Stolen.** See note on l. 198.

[What does *so* mean here ?]

247. **Tenderness.** Comp. "tender-taken breath" in Keats' Last Sonnet, "a gentle sigh," *lenis* of sounds in Latin writers, etc.

251. **Carpet.** So in l. 360. But in the Middle Ages *carpets* in the modern sense were almost unknown. What were called *carpets* then, were our table-cloths, as in *Tam. of the Shrew*, IV. i. 57. The only exception seems to have been that sometimes in palaces *carpets* were laid down in "my lady's chamber." "Isabella, queen of Edward II., had a black carpet in her chamber at Herford," etc.: see *Our English Home*. Floor-carpet (obs. the significance of this compound) were not common till the 17th century.

A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon 255
 A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet :—
 O for some drowsy Morphean amulet !
 The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
 The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet,
 Affray his ears, though but in dying tone :— 260
 The hall-door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

XXX.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
 In blanch'd linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
 While he from forth the closet brought a heap
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd, 265
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon,
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
 From Fez, and spiced dainties, every one,
 From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon. 270

XXXI.

These delicacies he heap'd with glowing hand
 On golden dishes and in baskets bright

256. This was a carpet in the mediæval sense.

257. **Morphean.** The accent *ought* to be on the penult. as in the case of *Orpheus* in *Par. Lost*, iii. 17.

amulet, of Arabian origin, strictly = something carried. *Talisman* is of Greek origin, and strictly = something consecrated.

263. **Lavender'd.** *Lavender*, Fr. *lavande*, derives its name from the usage here referred to.

265. **Candied** is said to be derived from the Pers. *gand* = *sugar*. So that *sugar-candy* is simply tautologous.

quince is the Fr. *coing*, Old Fr. *coïng*, Prov. *codoinq*, Ital. *cotogna*, Lat. *colonea* (see *Bruchet*), which comes from *Cydonia*, the name of a town in Crete.

gourd is from the Fr. *congourde*. Lat. *cucurbita* (from *cervus*).

267. **Syrups.** Fr. *sirop*, Low Lat. *sirupus*, Arab. *sharab*. *Shrub* and *sherbet* are cognate—are in fact but various forms of *syrup*.

268. **Argosy** is derived from *Argo*, the famous old Greek ship; or, more probably, from *Ragusa* the famous late mediæval port (at its greatest prosperity 1427-1440).

269. [Where are *Fez* and *Samarcand* ?]

270. *Samarcand* is described as a populous and prosperous city by the Spanish traveller Clavijo in the beginning of the 15th century.

Of wreathed silver : sumptuous they stand
 In the retired quiet of the night,
 Filling the chilly room with perfume light.— 275
 “ And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake !
 Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite :
 Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes’ sake,
 Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.”

XXXII.

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm 280
 Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
 By the dusk curtains :—’twas a midnight charm
 Impossible to melt as iced stream :
 The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam ;
 Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies : 285
 It seem’d he never, never could redeem
 From such a steadfast spell his lady’s eyes ;
 So mus’d awhile, entoil’d in woofed phantasies.

XXXIII.

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
 Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be, 290
 He play’d an ancient ditty, long since mute,
 In Provence call’d “ La belle dame sans mercy : ”

276. **Seraph.** How completely “artists” have ruined the word *cherub* as a term of endearment !

277. **Eremite.** Of this word *hermit* is a corruption.

284. **Salvers** = radically, tasting-dishes (so Wedgwood), or perhaps savers, safe-keepers.

285. *i. e.*, the fringe shows bright in the moonlight.

288. **Woofed** here loosely for woven.

289. **Hollow**, *i. e.* resounding.

292. See it in Keats’ Poems, ed. 1868, or that of 1871. (ed. W. Rossetti) or in the *Golden Treas. of Songs and Lyrics*. It would seem to have been rather the name of the old poem, than the old poem itself, that inspired Keats’ piece. The old poem, written originally by Alain Chartier in the early 15th century, translated into English by Sir Richard Ros, consists mainly of a somewhat prolix conversation between an obdurate lady and her lover, at the close of which she goes away indifferent to dance and play, he desperate to tear his hair and die.

Close to her ear touching the melody ;—
 Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan :
 He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly 295
 Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone :
 Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV.

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
 Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep :
 There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd 300
 The blisses of her dream so pure and deep ;
 At which fair Madeline began to weep,
 And moan forth witless words with many a sigh ;
 While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep ;
 Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye, 305
 Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

XXXV.

" Ah, Porphyro ! " she said, " but even now
 Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
 Made tuneable with every sweetest vow ;
 And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear : 310
 How changed thou art ! how pallid, chill, and drear !
 Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
 Those looks immortal, those complainings dear !
 Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
 For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go." 315

293. [How would you explain *touching the melody* ?]

309. **Tuneable.** See *M. N. D. I. i.* 182 :

" Your tongue's sweet air
 More *tuneable* than lark to shepherd's ear," etc.

(Complete nonsense is made of these words in Stevens' glee, by breaking off the connection of *air* with its predicate).

XXXVI.

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
 At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
 Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
 Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose ;
 Into her dream he melted, as the rose 320
 Blendeth its odor with the violet,—
 Solution sweet : meantime the frost-wind blows
 Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
 Against the window-panes ; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII.

'Tis dark ; quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet : 325
 " This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline !"
 'Tis dark : the iced gusts still rave and beat :
 " No dream, alas ! alas ! and woe is mine !
 Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—
 Cruel ! what traitor could thee hither bring ? 330
 I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,
 Though thou forsakest a deceived thing—
 A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing."

XXXVIII.

" My Madeline ! sweet dreamer ! lovely bride !
 Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest ? 335
 Thy beauty's shield, heart-shaped and vermeil dyed ?

318. See Keats' Sonnet, *Bright star ! would I were steadfast as thou art.*

325. **Flaw-blown.** *Flaw* = gust, blast, as often in Spenser.

330. Here Madeline really wakes.

333. **Unpruned** = untrimmed. *Prune* is ultimately from the stem *propago*. See *Cymb.* V. iv. 118.

" His royal bird
Prunes the immortal wing, and cloyes his beak,
 As when his god is pleas'd."

336. A somewhat fantastic piece of blazonry.

Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
 After so many hours of toil and quest,
 A famish'd pilgrim,—saved by miracle.
 Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest 340
 Saving of thy sweet self ; if thou think'st well
 To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel."

XXXIX.

"Hark ! 'tis an elfin storm from fairy land,
 Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed :
 Arise—arise ! the morning is at hand ;— 345
 The bloated wassailers will never heed :—
 Let us away, my love, with happy speed ;
 There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—
 Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead :
 Awake ! arise ! my love, and fearless be, 350
 For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."

XL.

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
 For there were sleeping dragons all around,
 At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears ;
 Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found, 355
 In all the house was heard no human sound.
 A chain-dropp'd lamp was flickering by each door ;
 The arras, rich with horsemen, hawk, and hound,

346. **Wassailers.** *Wassail* is said to be derived from the Ancient Eng. drinking salutation *wces-hael* = good health to join.

349. **Rhenish.** See *Mer. of Ven.*, I. ii. 102 ; *Hamlet*, I. iv. 10. *mead.* Milton uses the form *meath*, *Par. Lost*, v. 345.

355. **Darkling.** The p. part. of a supposed verb *darkle*, diminutive from *dark*, meaning in the dark or without light.

As the wakeful bird sings *darkling*.—Milton.

358. The arras of Henry V.'s bed was embroidered with scenes of hunting and hawking. See *Our Eng. Home*. Read M. Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*. Best of all, go and look at the old tapestry still hanging in the Earl's bed-chamber and the dressing-room belonging to it at Haddon Hall.

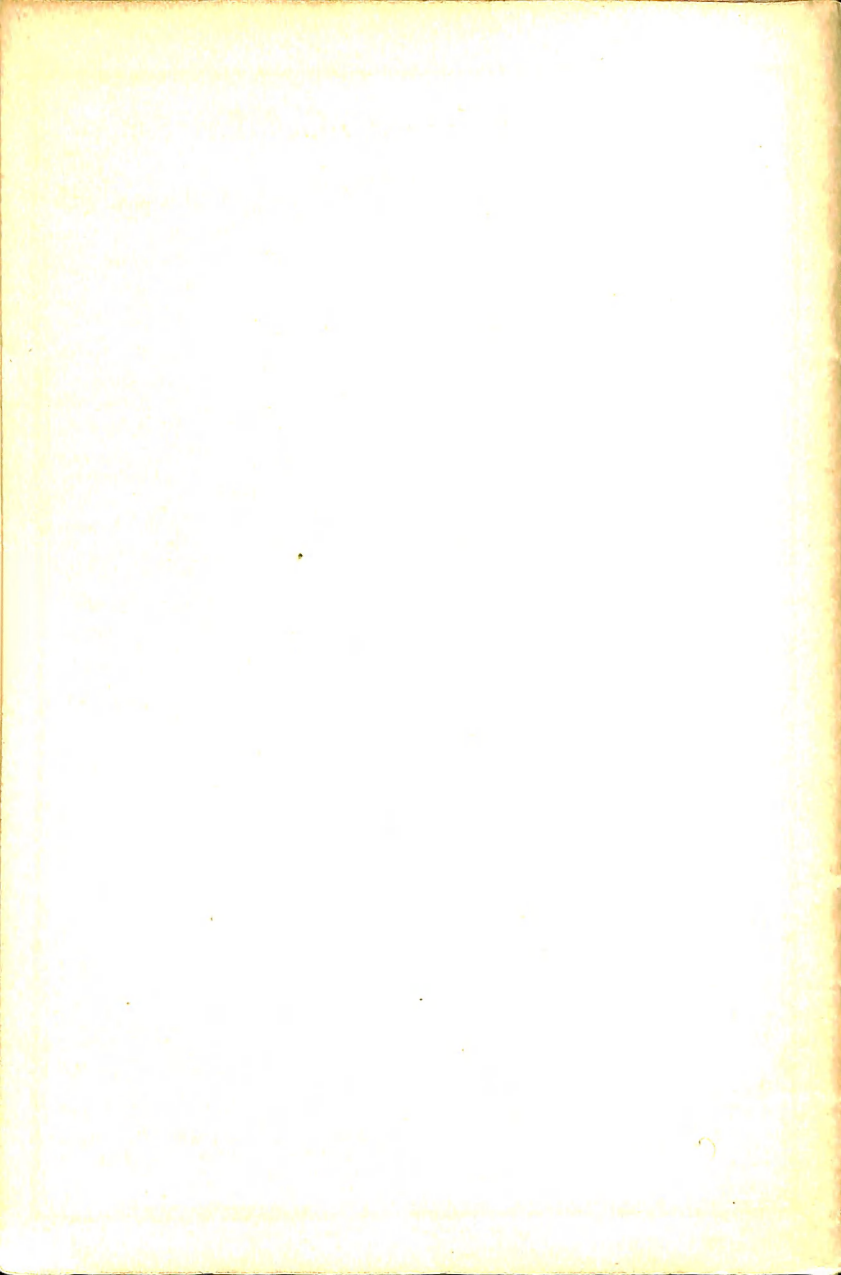
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar ;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor. 360

XLI.

They glide like phantoms, into the wide hall !
Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide,
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flagon by his side :
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide, 365
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns :
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide :—
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones ;
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans ;

XLII.

And they are gone : ay, ages long ago 370
These lovers fled away into the storm.
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
Were long be-nightmared. Angela the old 375
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform :
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For aye unsought-for slept among his ashes cold.



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